

# ENQUIRY

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UTOPIANISM AND POWER

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THE DECAY OF LIBERAL PACIFISM

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EXCHANGE:

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# UTOPIANISM AND POWER

## I.

"Politics will, to the end of history," remarks Reinhold Niebuhr, "be an area where conscience and power meet, where the ethical and coercive factors of human life will interpenetrate and work out their tentative and uneasy compromises."<sup>1</sup> And, in elaboration, he goes on: "In pure morality, society ought to recognize the individual as an end in himself, and ought to leave him free to find his life by losing it for social ends which appeal to his conscience. In actual history national and other communities will always coerce individuals to serve their purposes whether they will or no. They will try to reduce the unique individual to purely functional significance and they will partially succeed."<sup>2</sup>

With this view of history as a foundation, Niebuhr launches a general attack on what he terms "ethical utopianism." By this term he would include all views of the world and of history which fail, in his own estimation, to take account explicitly of the recalcitrance of human nature and social organization. They are political theories which accept the naive dogma that man is perfectible in history; social doctrines which see education as salvation, and progress as, if not inevitable, then at least as possible. Progress may be possible in a measure, Niebuhr argues, but the possibility, indeed the probability, of failing at each new level of achievement is a fact of politics.

Of all modern creeds which he categorizes as "utopian," Niebuhr is perhaps most emphatic with regard to what is called "pacifism"; and since the general problem of utopianism in politics is either implicit or explicit in his whole discussion of this subject, I propose in what follows to analyze briefly two of his objections to so-called "impossible" ideals as reflected in pacifism; to question several of his assertions while agreeing with others; and, in the process, to suggest a partial conception of the role of utopias in politics.<sup>3</sup>

## II.

Niebuhr's attack upon what he calls the utopianism of pacifism is found first of all in his allegation that in emphasizing war, pacifist social theory so distorts the issues of life as to make its doctrine grossly unrealistic. The pacifist tells us to refuse co-operation in war, and yet throughout most of his life he himself will co-operate in patterns of conduct which are inextricably bound up with war and without which war could not flourish. The pacifist does not see that, by making conscientious objection to war the sine qua non of righteousness, he himself commits the folly of self-righteousness. He selects one issue

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<sup>1</sup> Moral Man and Immoral Society, 4

<sup>2</sup> Reflections on the End of an Era, 109.

<sup>3</sup> G.H.C. MacGregor's *Relevance of an Impossible Ideal* has been very helpful in developing the argument of this paper. Indeed, a part of that argument is essentially a re-statement of MacGregor.

of politics on which to object, thinking thereby to resolve the problem of evil which is so complex as to admit of no such simple solution. War is wrenched from the context of life, so to speak, and made the devil; whereas it should be seen as only one among many manifestations of the coercive element in history overcoming the ethical. Pacifists fail to understand the historical process in this respect.

So reasons Niebuhr. And with some justification. There is no doubt a certain tendency in the political philosophy of pacifism to do what he condemns. But it would be unfair to maintain that pacifist theory is not increasingly aware of the manifold implications of its intransigence on the problem of war and violence. The fact that its speculations have carried it into such realms as decentralism and agrarianism, for example, is partial corroboration.

This, however, is not the main defense of what might be called the pacifist utopian view. Admitting that the pacifist utopist has seized upon only one issue and made it the focus of his attention, it can still be argued that such distortion is conformable to the very great function which all "impossible"—utopian—ideals have in the history of human societies. In every age the issues around which ideals revolve differ from one another—the point at which the major ethical problem arises may in one age take the form of personal salvation; in another chattel slavery; in yet another, war. The utopias of the first century Christians took the form of picturizing the imminent destruction of the powers of the world through the apocalyptic arrival of the Christ. The enthusiasts for Abolition in the first half of the nineteenth century saw the problem of human freedom centered in the question of slavery. The pacifist utopian sees the summation of all twentieth century ethical issues in war.

This means, of course, that in each case the whole picture of human life is distorted. It means that many other centers of the ever-present ethical problem must be ignored and that the center of attention around which the utopia is built must represent the whole. But to the utopist this is not a misfortune, since he believes that the problem of generating the power to act in society can be resolved only by what in the beginning seems to be a process of distortion. The secondary issues of any generation, he thinks, can be best revealed when seen through the most dramatic and overwhelming focus. But this focus changes from age to age and thus the problem of restating "impossible" ideals is ever with us and ever new. Like a man searching for the horizon, the quest is never complete; for each step creates a new horizon with its own trees and mountains.

Thus, some of the Abolitionists saw the problem of freedom largely in terms of chattel slavery; and once that institution had been abolished, they fought against any restatement of freedom in terms of the growing industrial slavery. In so doing they ceased to be utopists—they were unwilling to recognize that while, in a sense, their former ideals were possible, they were, at the same time, impossible. The ideals were impossible in that their formulators, in the process

of making the ideal real, concrete, and dramatic (and that, after all, is one of the prime functions of utopianization), had identified the abolition of chattel slavery with the whole problem of freedom. From the viewpoint of utopia, the real issue is not whether we should build our "impossible" ideals around a particular focus—the utopist would hold that the human will is moved to action only in that manner—but rather whether we shall be able to recognize the new point of focus once it appears. It may, indeed, be argued that the decline of radicalism in the twentieth century is partly attributable to its scorn, in words, of utopianization; and to its allegiance, in practice, to what is really an outworn nineteenth century utopia. Thinking it had discovered a permanent "science," much radicalism did not see that its own legitimately "distorted" nineteenth century view could not move men to action in the twentieth.

Utopia in any age is, then, the identification of some great issue of life with the few areas which seem to constitute the foci around which men in that age see the questions of human conduct. It is the task of the utopian thinker to articulate and make explicit this identification. The utopist takes the abstract speculations of the social philosophers, translates them into the concrete imagery of a few dominant issues of the day, and thus provides the foundation stones of dynamic action. It is true that this process results in corruption and distortion; but the alternative is to leave the ideals in the ivory tower and in the end to acquiesce in whatever event the interacting forces of history may produce.

### III.

At no point does Niebuhr become more emphatic than when he deals with the problem of non-violence and its relation to power; and here again another aspect of the problem of utopia is stated. Niebuhr argues that the religious ideal of non-resistance can in no wise be discovered in the modern pacifist conception of non-violent resistance and that non-resistance is utterly inapplicable in the arena of politics. Not that the religious idealist must not embrace the philosophy of non-resistance—he "submits to any demands, however unjust, and yields to any claims, however inordinate, rather than assert self-interest against another"<sup>4</sup>—but rather that the gulf between the religious view, which would turn the other cheek, and the political view, which is concerned with rights and obligations, is unbridgeable. Those who attempt to span this gulf are mixing incompatible elements—religious idealism which seeketh not its own and is concerned with a renunciation of power; and political realism which sees the necessity for a measure of coercion in a world where the "vitalities" of life are constantly impinging on the ideal. It is a world where, if power is not completely renounced, all the evils attributable to it will inhere in its "non-violent" as well as in its "violent" forms. The political theory of modern pacifism is defective in

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<sup>4</sup> *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 264.

that it does not see that politics is the "twilight" zone between ethical idealism, on the one hand, and power on the other. If one utilizes social or political power at all, one must be willing to use all types of it. "Non-violent" power may be expedient in a particular instance; but to elevate it to the status of a principle is to fail to understand what politics is all about. It is, moreover, to fall a prey to those very barbarians who have no ethical scruples at all and thus to negate the moderate possibilities of progress which do lie within history.

So much for Niebuhr on power and the blundering attempts of pacifism to differentiate between violent and non-violent forms of it. What are we to say in reply? Is the ideal which he terms "impossible" truly so; and if it is, must we therefore discard it completely, as he suggests?

He is right in maintaining that non-violent resistance cannot be equated with non-resistance—that most proponents of pacifism in its modern form would admit. He would seem to be on solid ground, moreover, in pointing out the danger of corruption even in the seeking of power by non-violent means. But when he concludes from all this that no distinction in principle can be made between violent and non-violent power, it would seem to be like arguing against the possibility of distinctions in degree becoming distinctions in kind. A plane raining bombs on Tokyo is certainly an exemplification of power. So also is the night stick of a policeman separating two inebriated fighters. But surely it is not fantastic to make a distinction in kind between the two types of power utilized. What particular species of power may be classified as "violent" and what as "non-violent" is indeed a problem about which the political theory of pacifism is not too clear. But it is an unwarranted confusion to make all power identical with violence; to equate all force with violence and all violence with force. Any philosophy of power which does not see a Jesus on the cross as a type of social power is surely wanting in its understanding of the forces which move men to action; and is in sooth on somewhat doubtful foundations if, recognizing it, it does not discern a difference in ethical quality between the crucifixion and, for example, the clash of two armies on the battlefield.

The pacifist statement would seem validly to argue, then, that it is possible to distinguish violent from non-violent power. But is it possible to make the differentiation so clear and convincing that, in practice, the distinction will not be blurred or even disappear? Will not Mr. Niebuhr's "vitalities" of history act with their customary ruthlessness and so in the end make the distinction between violence and non-violence virtually meaningless?

To these questions the pacifist must again answer that in a certain way his ideal is "impossible." It is impossible in that no human ideal is completely achieved. It is impossible in the sense that every ideal which moves beyond the ethical standards of a given age is impossible. It is impossible, moreover, in the sense that it involves a certain faith in the long-run ability of pacifist non-violence to win out

against those very "vitalities" of history which to the "realist" are so ubiquitous.

Now every act of utopianization is "impossible" in this way: it is a glimpse of an order of affairs from the vantage point of an order radically different. Most utopianizations have as one of their elements a state of mankind in which power will become subordinate to principle and the type of power utilized will remain conducive to the principles exalted—and this is, of course, emphatically true of pacifist thought. In picturing this ideal, utopias once more reflect an act of distortion and not infrequently ignore the "vitalities" which at any moment might again overcome them. Whether this distortion be identified with Sorel's myth or whether it simply be termed a "utopia," there remains a quality of "impossibility" about it.

But that does not imply its inapplicability. Indeed, the very distortion which to some degree is characteristic of utopia is at one and the same time a guarantee that the ethical standards of the moment must measure themselves beside something more permanent than the short-run pragmatism by which actions would otherwise be judged. Moreover, the very gulf between the ideal—the "impossible"—and those standards which, from the measurable short-run point of view, seem to be "possible," is perhaps the most profound stimulus to action which it is possible to create. The recalcitrance in human social organization and the evil will in the human heart which so many modern thinkers are increasingly rediscovering will not succumb to ideals which, on first glance, seem to be "possible." The stubbornness and rebellion which our neo-orthodoxy is finding at the center of things are not to be exorcised by a too-easy identification of the ideal with the immediately possible. Only God—not even His angels—will eventually triumph over the devil. Utopia so often fails to note explicitly the recalcitrant elements of politics precisely because the "vitalities of history" are frequently so ubiquitous as to need no explicit description; and this disentangling of heaven from the chains of earth enables us to return from the other world with a clearer perception of what we need to do in this.

#### IV.

Thus "impossible" ideals may be defended on at least two scores: they enable mankind to picture in terms of one or two dominant ethical issues the course of action it ought to pursue and, at the same time, by creating a wide gulf between the ideal and the historical reality, they provide that social dynamic, or, if one prefers, that power, which moves men to change what is. It is true that in so doing they are often blind to other issues which might in a different period stand out as the axes of the ethical problem. It is true also that they sometimes ignore the presence of recalcitrance in human relations. But in both cases the "distortion" so effected turns out on final examination to be no distortion when measured by its relationship to power and to the changes which power may bring about. "Impossible" ideals may in-

deed be looked upon as the poetry of social philosophy; and it is the social function of religion to keep before us at all times the poetic quality and the necessity of the impossible.

At one point<sup>5</sup> Niebuhr himself compares any profound study of history to the problem of painting a landscape—three-dimensional structure which must be reproduced in two-dimensional form. So it is with utopia in human affairs. Distorted it may seem on initial and literal inspection; but in the end its very distortion enables men to see more clearly the original. Condemning the existing order, it sketches the architecture of the three-dimensional City of God upon the two-dimensional canvas of human perspective. But it is constantly erasing its sketches; and with equal constancy it is generating the power which gives impetus and scope to what men call progress.

MULFORD SIBLEY.

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## THE DECAY OF LIBERAL PACIFISM

### I.

I have passed the last year and a half of my life at a Civilian Public Service Camp. One hundred and fifty souls dwell there, all of whom have been classified by Selective Service as persons conscientiously opposed to participation in war.

There is a notable diversity of thought in our community, small though it is. There are a "Bible belt," and "inner light" group (members of the Society of Friends), a doughty "social action" coterie, a three-man "Kremlin," four Jehovah's witnesses, a Christadelphian, and some miscellaneous chaps known as "wobblies." I venture to say that the complexion of sentiment in our camp is in a general way characteristic of that in the other CO camps administered by the Friends and of those run directly by the government. In both types of camp the tone is set pretty much by young city intellectuals operating against a backdrop of liberal Protestantism. To put it in thumbnail fashion, we are midway between a medieval, hymnsinging monastic brotherhood and a modern college fraternity.

The more I have studied our newest generation of pacifists as they flow into CPS, the graver has become my concern about certain themes which recur with increasing frequency in their conversations. In what follows I shall comment briefly on the validity of some of these young men's conclusions and emphasize the relevance of those conclusions for the pacifist movement.

### II.

First, let us take the thesis that is becoming increasingly explicit among pacifists who call themselves liberals. I refer to the belief that Salvation from war must come by way of the "just socialistic-Christ-

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<sup>5</sup> See his *Beyond Tragedy*.

ian Communities society." Their college study of history seems to have given them a surprising facility at drawing lines between the "good" and the "bad" people. A great gulf yawns between "socialist" and "reactionaries" on the basis of their behavior when given dominance. Their study of history appears never to have raised in their minds the suspicion that idealists, when they have obtained power, have regularly become mankind's greatest oppressors. Alexander, Caesar, Cromwell, Robespierre, and the builders of Sovietism.... (need we come closer home?) are cases in point. Add to this the fact that individuals act and react quite differently (more ruthlessly, group-selfishly, etc.) when submerged in groups than they do as individuals (the larger the group or organization the more this holds true) and you have the basis for what Machiavelli and other realistic students of politics have perceived (they have been damned for it by clergymen and professors but never refuted): namely, that a different system and scale of ethical values obtains and in the nature of things must obtain in the relations between groups (and probably as between group and individual) from that which is recognized as good between and among individual persons.

You cannot, as an executive or administrator, forgive seventy times seven times and keep your organization together. The first postulate of organization is its own survival. The business or labor union which invariably makes a practice of "walking the second mile" may find itself forced to the wall or fail to achieve the justifiable purpose for which it was formed. Again, the A.F. of L. cannot "love" the C.I.O.

Let us approach this matter of individual versus group ethics from another angle. Try carrying over some of the personal virtues in order to observe carefully and realistically in what manner they function within the purview of corporate relations. Take the virtue of self-sacrifice. Everyone assents to its ennobling effect upon individual character when voluntarily and self-consciously undertaken. But what is its meaning when applied to a nation? We have had dinned into our ears the glories of the national sacrifices involved in Lend-Lease, in the whole defense-war program. But why not be honest with ourselves? Experience of the actualities of sacrifice on this organizational level reveals many, many most disquieting factors that do not exist at all, or only negligibly, in the personal practice of the very same virtue! Perpetuation of violence. Social deterioration on an enormous scale. Destruction of good will among men. Hypocrisy. Where is there a counterpart of a single one of these social effluents in self-sacrifice as practised by an individual?

Nor is there anything other than bitter fallacy in the analogy drawn by our "progressive" societal metaphysicians between individual self-dedication (purposiveness) and the factionalism, or—worse—the "democratic centralism" which comes with group devotion to a social goal. Total individual self-immolation for a worthwhile life-purpose can be constructive. Total group self-dedication to the furtherance of some idealistic social design has led man time after time down the ruinous road of intolerance ("moral indignation"), dictatorship, and war.

How far does non-violent non-cooperation improve human relations when applied by one group to another? Do not sanctions under many circumstances increase the probability of war? Did not the sit-down strikes create a wave of reactionary hysteria qualitatively incomparable with the calculable reaction of an average individual when a fellow human being adopts non-violent tactics and refuses to cooperate? Have social groups ever by reason of a change of heart or a religious experience reconciled themselves to a diminution of privileges? Is it possible to sensitize the conscience of the State? If in international relations, as Mr. William Hard observes, national commitments lead inevitably to national dishonor, how comes it that men of good will have always found in the fulfillment of their obligations a life of personal integrity and honor?

It is not desirable to focalize reflections like the foregoing into any pat little formula. One might, perhaps, estimate their least common denominator somewhat as follows: A pattern of action that is appropriate to and conducive of the good life for the individual man may not be accepted ipso facto as valid or desirable in relationships among groups. One need not posit that social ethics in this sense is opposite or even necessarily contrary to private ethics. What one must say is that it has fundamentally idiosyncratic premises. We are dealing with a distinction in nature, not merely with variations in quantity, emphasis, or frame of reference.

We need to be as realistic as the founders of this republic. They rejected the Platonic doctrine that the indefectible self-restraint of the ruler-sages was to translate itself automatically into a corresponding and dependable equilibrium of the State. They insisted on independent checks, specifically built into the government in an integral and self-perpetuating fashion. Distinguishing between individual and institutional norms, they conceded the necessity but not the morality of governments. Jefferson, in a letter to Madison, writes: "Educate and inform the whole mass of people. They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of liberty." The successors of Jefferson, while retaining the label of liberalism, have so far reversed its meaning that scarcely any but the Nazis evince so pathetically naive a trust in the "good leader" as does the modern liberal. Perhaps that aspect of liberal mentality explains, at least in part, such baffling phenomena as the recent refusal of the Arch and Race Streets Yearly Meetings of the Friends to pass a resolution advocating "immediate steps to end the war," and the report of Ray Wilson after two weeks of discussions with leaders of the church, education, and labor, that he found these bodies "not prepared at present to oppose passage" of a measure for permanent military conscription of American youth!

The severance of institutional from personal ethics is highly unpalatable both to clerical homilists and to academic ideologists. Pre-pounders of the social gospel are prone to simplistic views of institutional ethics. They tend to assume that Christ vouchsafed a gospel to corporate bodies that is qualitatively interchangeable with his deliverance to individual believers. It has been posited—without proof and

ordinarily even without examination—that in the Christian society individuals and groups are to be equiparated in the same ethical framework. There must be first of all “friendship” and “co-operation” between States. Result: the old fallacious faith in international governmental mechanisms enjoys a new lease of life. Labor and capital must learn to “get on together.” Hence the slowness of the churches to interest themselves in decentralist enterprises, which bypass the well-nigh insoluble tangle of social conflict in industrial relations. The analogy between the State and the individual, in its application to the conduct of the former, is inveterate in post-Nicene Christian dogma and is prescriptive in the “just war” strain of Protestant tradition. In the *City of God* Augustine held that just as a parent may punish out of true affection so may the nation if the motive is similar. And Luther wrote: “War is a concession to men as sinners; but in all justice men and nations alike must be punished.”

I do not believe that Christ dealt in any such knowing double talk. It seems to me that his message was addressed to, as it was a reaction to and from, the lives of individual men as he met and knew them. If that is true, then those who seek the New Testament’s social gospel must expect to find not a ready-made house, but a kit of tools. To take, in letter or spirit, precepts that were intended for individual, God-created human beings, and to transfer them to the relationships between or among such highly factitious entities as modern States is vitiation and perversity.

Christ did not teach that States should love (read “co-operate with”) one another, but that men should. He did not condemn, even by implication, a policy of national self-interest, any more than he approved international political do-good-ism or a global WPA. A true understanding of Christ will compel us to cut through current shibboleths—political, religious, pacifist—and to test every program by these criteria: (1) does it increase the stature of individual men in the most spiritual and most genuinely human sense? (2) does it tend to promote spontaneous good will in individual human beings, one for another? In the Christian ethic, correctly apprehended, there can be no set attitude vis-a-vis specific organizations or institutions (Christianity flourished, contrary to much that is currently being said, long before modern democracy was invented). As there is no authentic pronouncement, so there can be no persevering “line” concerning the interplay of the modern world’s vast corporative units as such. There may in fact come times when nationalism (i.e., political isolationism) may be the policy which most nearly squares with the criteria suggested above. Then, truly, within the Christian fold, shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another, and the love of many shall wax cold.

The multitudes who have become imbued with the poisonous honey of the state ideal will denounce this interpretation as pragmatic and opportunistic. Nevertheless, it is they who have devoted themselves to immediate goals and obsessed themselves with partial loyalties. Theirs is the limited vision. It must not be deferred to. Christianity

can stand for the health of States or for the salvation of men's immortal souls, but not for both.

### III.

Now let us look briefly at the liberal intellectuals. It has become clear that the more eloquently they plead for freedom the less freedom they give and get. The reasons are various and devious. Centrally, the answer involves their pragmatic outlook. Philosophically, modern liberalism has asserted a theoretical emphasis on the qualities of intellectual flexibility and tolerance. Fundamentally, it was, or rather it should have been, an attitude. But historically it wound up as little more than a continuing series of accredited and quasi-compulsive commitments. You were for legislation—almost any legislation—that benefited the labor unions. You favored internationalism, of whatever kind. That went without saying. You were inflexibly against militarism. It was all pretty standard and there was not too much reflection or searching of the soul.

Then came crisis, compelling us all to divest ourselves of impedimental contrarieties of belief. Now we must choose that single ground which we were prepared to hold at any cost. What would we do when labor unions acquiesced in militarism? Most liberals followed labor. But now labor finds itself faced with the threat of ruthless if gradual suppression to meet the needs of the military. The heart is being cut out of liberal education as the war effort demands it. Labor unions have proved themselves susceptible to oligarchic and dictatorial abuses. Sight unseen, liberals snapped at the first application of internationalism they were offered. In so doing, they sold America an iniquitous inter-governmental racket so titanic that it now seems impossible to control.

The liberals have chosen their ground, and these days they do not hesitate to particularize it. They are for the closest shortcuts to "plenty" and "security." The little matter of freedom, formerly primary in the liberal creed, will have to be temporarily shelved if it conflicts with these twin ad hoc commitments. And the fact is that it does. All known schemes whose principal aim is plenty and security for the masses are, whatever their pretensions may be, totalitarian.

Totalitarianism and liberty cannot live together. You cannot be a liberal in politics today and have a practising belief in freedom of thought. On that point, consider an illustration of current liberal mentality, taken at random: the recurring hue and cry for denial of civil rights to certain persons who happen to be insufficiently impressed by the wonders achieved through modern democratic head-counting. Many liberals were simply scandalized when Sir Oswald Mosley, English fascist, was released from prison and allowed to return to his home. Their liberal totalitarian hearts bled. If liberalism is so neurasthenic that it has become nothing but a set of agreed upon expediences to be assented to, then one wonders whether it is worth saving.

It has been the distinctively liberal delusion that to create a better world you properly re-organize society. Organization: that was the thing. And since the semi-utopian community that would

some day exist was to be international, peaceful, and co-operative, you gave a fairly indiscriminating plus to whatever persons or methods seemed to hasten the achievement of those social goals. What liberals forgot was that organization *per se* is interested in conformity. With the best of intentions, they destroy the spirit without which nothing is made manifest. My soul, how they do cling to their secular pre-millennialism!

This war is making it clear that even that branch of liberalism which one might have thought most realized that methods determine ends has its gaze more firmly fixed on the organized utopia hereafter than on the processes and principles of the here and now. Overcome by this political presbyopia and convinced through economic determinism that our involvement and continued participation in this war was and is "inevitable," pacifist liberals have broadened out their pacifism. They have broadened it so much that they have virtually lost it. Scarcely a hairline now divides liberal pacifists from their war-making liberal brethren. Both groups (and here is the crux of the matter) sense that war is propelling to fulfillment with enormous rapidity their dream of an all-embracing social welfare state. That dream, and that dream alone, is their preoccupation. If the war must be prolonged to assure that, they acquiesce. Humane liberals never relished the prospect of the barricades. Now they discover they can relinquish the task of social revolution to the inevitable logic of the war emergency.

#### IV.

Accepted pacifist doctrine continues at this writing to be verbally repeated. But the ominous change of heart has silently taken place. Will the liberal peace movement have moral strength to face its symptomatic inner conflict? Will it, accepting the intellectually verifiable proposition that we are in for a bad peace no matter how events may turn, act upon its professed doctrine that a bad peace is better than the best war? Will it work for peace now? Or, alternatively, will it frankly declare itself in agreement with the war-minded liberals and accept the total state and war—in short, will it renounce pacifism?

RICHARD HENRY CRUM

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## EXCHANGE: REVOLUTION SACRED AND PROFANE

In the Fall, 1944 issue of *Enquiry*, Philip Selznick presents a canvas entitled "Revolution Sacred and Profane." Social action, he observes, rather correctly, is restricted to certain channels by "the limitation of alternatives, or... the presentation of historical choices."

For the socialist movement, he declares, this principle is manifested in the two polar trends described as "reformist social democracy and apocalyptic bolshevism." We are forced to choose between one of these, he asserts, for "there is no middle course which will not soon be drawn into the vortex of one or the other of the historical alternatives." Thus self-imprisoned by an "either-or" formula of inevitability identical to that taught by the Cannonites, Selznick chooses reformism. "Socialists who have come to know the spiritual roots (!) of what they stand for will recognize immediately their affinity with the gradualist course."

He goes on to say that although European socialism went down to defeat stumbling over its own errors and poor leadership, "these movements remained basically socialist and progressive.... The social democratic road leans on those cultural roots which we seek to defend.... Social Democracy accepts the basic Christian-democratic values."

The last phrase of the above should be enough to wake Marx from his slumber, but so much for Selznick's views on the reformists. Some questions might be presented regarding their "basic socialist and progressive character." Was it basically socialist and progressive for the Social-Democratic minister of war, Gustav Noske, to order the slaughter of the German Spartacists? How can any differentiation be made between this crime and the Bolshevik slaughter of the Kronstadt sailors? Was it basically socialist and progressive for the Social-Democratic politicians to participate in one capitalist ministry after another, to support Hindenburg for president of Germany in 1932, and to vote for Hitler's foreign policy in 1933?<sup>1</sup>

Was it basically socialist and progressive for Blum and his socialists to join Chamberlain in isolating Spain during the civil war? Is it basically socialist and progressive for the European reformists continually to congratulate Roosevelt on his re-elections? Is it basically socialist and progressive for the Laborite Ernest Bevin to conscript 16 year old youths for work in the coal mines, and to send workers to jail for resisting labor control regulations? Was it basically socialist and progressive when the British Labor Party on July 2, 1942, approved the arrest of Gandhi and Nehru and opposed the Indian Independence movement? Is it basically socialist and progressive to make a truce with the Tories and to support imperialist war?

These examples are not exceptional. They are characteristic of Social-Democracy during the last thirty years, the Social-Democracy which Rosa Luxemburg was compelled to call a "stinking corpse as early as 1907. The list of "errors" could be extended to great length, but let us simply conclude by saying the reformists are basically regressive. Selznick himself illustrates this regression, although apologetically.

"Socialism today" (read "reformism") says Selznick, "is more and more becoming the receptacle, protagonist and defender of the fundamental social ties as well as the highest ideals of our [Capitalist] civilization." Formerly they could lay their stress on changes and overturns, allowing the conservatives the task of defending the principles and institutions of the existing social order. "But this timeless allocation of function, the conservative defender and radical innovator,

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1. See *N. Y. Times*, May 18, 1933.

has been robbed of its meaning by the complexity of new relationships." Thus Selznick goes on to propose a repetition of the strategy which led European social democracy to an ignominious crash. The social democracy, faced with a collapse of the old political and economic order, approached its impending doom by defending the bourgeois constitutions which the bourgeoisie no longer wished to support. Unfortunately, millions of unemployed could not eat constitutions. They were in a revolutionary mood, and this sentiment was channelized behind the pseudo-revolutionary program of fascism. Socialists in rallying to the status quo did not and could not save the latter or achieve Socialism. It will do no good for well-fed middle class theoreticians to complain that the workers "made a fetish of security." We should know by now that there can be no democracy without security. We live in a world where we must move forward or be forced to retreat. Nothing but a program of revolutionary democratic socialism, a policy of uncompromising class struggle, can save us from chaos. The alleged liberties of the bourgeois revolutions of the past three centuries, which were never fully realized, are now being crushed under the weight of capitalism's corpse, and reformism cannot save them. This is the most fundamental lesson we must learn from the defeats of social democracy.

It is also necessary to reject Selznick's schematic "polarization" dogma, in the manner he presents it. There is probably a good case for the thesis that one must ultimately choose between reformism and revolution, but we must reject the gospel, held jointly by Selznick and the Trotskyists, that bolshevism has a monopoly on revolution, and that it is the only genuine opposite of reformism. The social democrats and bolsheviks were not at such opposite poles as might appear on the surface. They were both statist, one hoping to achieve their ends through the bourgeois state apparatus, the other through a new state apparatus. Both of them were capable of slaughtering democratic movements of discontented workers. Today also reformist professors such as Laski and Lange find much to admire in Stalinism.

We are not compelled to choose between these putrid "alternatives." There are a number of inspiring examples of leaders and movements which rejected both of them: the French Communards of 1871, the Independent Socialists and Spartacists of Germany, especially those under the influence of Luxemburg and Liebknecht; Martov and the Menshevik Internationalists of Russia, the POUM of Spain, Pivert's PSOP of France, the Independent Labor Party of Great Britain, the Polish Bund. Of course none of these triumphed, ultimately, but that proves nothing. History is too long and the experience of our movement too short to make premature judgments. In a larger and more real sense, the two predominant tendencies of bolshevism and social democracy did not triumph either. Should Selznick attempt to prove his polarization theory by pointing out that the German Independents later went back to Social Democracy and the Spartacists joined the Comintern, we might ask him to explain whether the present social-democratic and Communist support of Roosevelt and Churchill proves that both of his polar tendencies must inevitably be dragged back into the vortex of capitalist politics. Obviously Selznick dares not answer in the affirmative, for to do so would be to abandon hope for any sort of fundamental social chance through political methods. If the latter is the case, Enquiry followers should retire from politics.

We must also challenge Selznick's discovery of a connection between Christianity and democracy which is implied in his phrase "Christian-democratic values." In these times when imperialism finds it politic to extol the symbols of democracy, the preachers have endeavored to cash in on the glory by attributing common origins to Christianity and democracy. Historically, however, the great formulators of democratic theory and the leaders of democratic action

have been primarily secular or atheist. The emphasis of Locke, Rousseau, Paine, Jefferson, Marx, and Debs was worldly, and these men were considered godless by their contemporaries. Mystics such as Milton and Calvin supported class rule. The Christian dictatorships of Calvin at Geneva, Cromwell in England, Catholicism in Spain, and both Protestant and Catholic princes in Germany, were as ruthless as any in their day or ours. Here, too, Selznick's formula is not firmly grounded in fact.

But let us proceed to the Selznick program. He wants a "limited revolt" to be "concentrated against only a relatively small sector of society as we know it." Selznick is forced to admit that "gradualism collapses as an effective program when we face the co-ordinate, integrated structure of our mass-production economy." Therefore firm and decisive measures are to be taken against the small number of ruling families and their satellites "in order to permit reformism to operate as an advance guard and in broader fields." Rear guard reformism is to be promoted to advance guard reformism. Good! But how? Reformism as we know it has never shown a tendency to assault the bastions of privilege. Slight moves in that direction have always led to armed conflict. Selznick, the avowed radical reformist proposes to meet this eventuality with "the moral absolute of pacifism," which he again couples, like democracy, to Christianity, although the greatest development of pacifist methods has been in non-Christian countries. In order to make the bankruptcy complete, Selznick proposes to leave the seeds for future ruling families intact, for "the multitude in small industry," is not to be "rooted out."

The crowning disappointment in Selznick's approach is, perhaps his bold embrace of outmoded and unscientific human nature concepts.<sup>2</sup> He pauses to note that he is "not entirely ignorant of the modern viewpoint in social psychology, with its brash plasticity-complex," then goes on to speak repeatedly in variations of his topical theme: "the limiting nature of human personality." The text abounds with allusion to the permanence of man's corrupt character. Both bolshevism and social democracy are said to have "deep roots in man's nature," and "the gradualist emphasis... is ever conscious of the limited capacity of men and structures." Again "the enduring character of human materials," and "dependable human failing" find a place in the Selznick formula.

A current of mysticism also permeates Selznick's opus, finding expression in phrases such as "the moral sources of its (the movement's) being," as well as the "spiritual roots" and "moral absolutes" already mentioned. What is the foundation for these ill defined concepts? Is it God? Selznick leaves us wondering.

In conclusion, Selznick advises his readers to work as political missionaries in the reformist wing of the polar trend, while offering radical revisions. Thus there is an exchange of hostages. The disillusioned reformists, in the past, became bolsheviks, and now the disillusioned bolsheviks become reformists. None of them think to release their hold on the crazy swinging pendulum and plant their feet on the firm soil of revolutionary democratic socialism.

It would be a healthy inoculation of certain types of liberal organizations if they were penetrated by the Selznick missionaries. Their talk of morality and democracy, their skepticism of the state and their antipathy to the war would be excellent in the Union for Democratic Action, for example. But in the revolutionary movement they can only be a retarding element.

VIRGIL J. VOGEL

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2. A Marxist approach to this problem is contained in "Materialist Psychology." by Ralph Tirrat, in the *Midwest Young Socialist*, June and July-August, 1943.

## REPLY

Mr. Vogel's stout defense of his received precepts invites us to look again at the fundamental issues which divide the movements of social re-creation. For it is plain that the basis of his criticism binds him firmly within the limits of disintegrative Marxism, this despite his efforts to resolve a unique movement into existence.

I believe that the question once again in debate—of social democracy vs. bolshevism—and the choice implied, represents a summing-up in political terms of the long, searching reappraisal which has turned the socialist movement in upon itself in recent years. This inquiry has taken two general directions: on the one hand, the definition of specific matters of policy with a view to correcting errors of the past; and on the other, the restatement of the moral and philosophical foundations of our movement as a social force—primarily in response to the axial problem of means and ends. The former is an exercise in the mechanics of power, whose conclusions find their warrant in the interplay of empirical judgments. But it should be easy to see, if only through our sense of the fitness of things, that such conclusions must be subordinated to those which define our personality as a movement, which provide us with a concept of our place in history. Power and influence are of the essence of politics, and it would be idle to suggest that we are unconcerned over the conditions of their achievement; yet those for whom the springs of political behavior lie in a moral vision must know first of all where they belong, with whom they have kinship, among the trends which shape history and mold men's minds. That decision may be postponed, but it will come sooner or later; and when it does come, the limits of political pragmatics will be set—not only by the world-view to which the movement subscribes, but by the compromise and adjustments which new problems and living alliances may force upon it. Practical judgments, however vital, are and ought to be fluid and hypothetical, subject in varying degrees to revision and adjustment under the pressure of events, of new analysis. But social forces, which seek to intervene in rather than comment upon human affairs and thus to influence the course of history, endure as a unity and effective power only on the basis of a viable conception of their own nature.

The root error of those who seek to delineate a middle road between social democracy and bolshevism lies in the conception of political prognosis as essentially a technical problem in the strategy of power. There were such and such errors (or "crimes") on both sides; these must be avoided; this is how to do it. To be sure, this is a proper and legitimate inquiry in the construction of the special policy of some particular organization. Any given leadership is relatively free to exercise dispassionate judgment in the development of its own program. But that same leadership loses its freedom, becomes only a factor in historical causation, when it begins to intervene in the struggle for social power. For then we are faced with the thrust and interdependence of forces—ideological, economic, social—which exist independently of us, and exercise compulsions of their own. In totalitarian politics, a party may absorb a movement; yet even here it is easy to discern a long history of choices among the facts of power at hand — choices made on the basis of broad assumptions about history and its own role. In democratic politics, several different parties may share a set of assumptions and therefore constitute, together with the broader layers which they may influence, a social movement. These organizations, differing as to means and organized to sustain and promulgate those differences, will yet accept responsibility for each other against the rest of the world. It is because they have a common fund of values and objectives that they can work together and participate in the give and take of political compromise.

Even a casual familiarity with the facts is sufficient to demonstrate the profound difference between the kind of cleavage which separates socialists and communists (including Trotskyists) and that which divides the Socialist Party from the Social Democratic Federation. Between the former, there is no common ground, because their social assumptions are mutually repulsive; but it requires no great stretch of the imagination to envision a reconciliation (and even unity) between the latter. Mr. Vogel, in this connection, has tasked me with agreement with Trotsky. I cannot be dismayed at this. Repudiation of echt-bolshevik Trotskyism is of course my text. But I do not therefore ignore the profound insight which did not hesitate to abandon superfluous ideological distinctions in wielding the scalpel of political analysis. No one was better versed in the vagaries of parties, in the prediction of the course of leadership, and the determining compulsions which bind them to those social forces to which their assumptions commit them. Nor was any mind more sensitive to the far-reaching consequences of the kind of muddle-headedness which tries to blur or straddle the actual historical choices which are offered to a current leadership. Trotsky made the wrong historic choice; but he understood the dynamics of choice, using tools (scarcely ever made explicit) which are as applicable to one side as to the other.

Mr. Vogel's criticism scuttles itself. However, much we may be gratified by the verbal repudiation of bolshevism, it would be irresponsible sentimentalism to ignore the fact that he still embraces some of the most fundamental assumptions of the bolshevik worldview. It suffices to list: (1) Acceptance of a thoroughgoing and irreconcilable class struggle, to be resolved by force. This precept excludes the possibility of responsible participation in democratic institutions, repudiates them at the outset and contributes heavily to their disintegration. At the last, it is a theory which drives relentlessly to a perspective of seizing power through the mechanics of chaos. "Unfortunately," Mr. Vogel reminds us, "millions of unemployed could not eat constitutions." A revealing sentence! For bolshevism the answer is simple: the broom of history will sweep away the legalistic rubbish. But for social democracy there is a problem, appealing to all the wisdom it can command. To say that a defense of constitutionalism means a rally to the status quo is to abandon all hope of resolving the crisis without social disintegration. This is one of the main assumptions of bolshevism. What does it mean to say that "uncompromising class struggle can save us from chaos" if it does not mean the introduction of order through terror, repression, dictatorship? There may be new responses to such situations, but history is not yet aware of them. (2) To Mr. Vogel, modern culture is essentially alien-capitalist. He cannot accept, therefore, the idea of cultural continuity which is part of the foundation of the social-democratic view. Nor may he, on this basis, participate in the conservation of the well-springs of democratic morality, nor avoid a nihilistic alternative. (3) We learn from Mr. Vogel's strictures that he remains bound to totalitarian economics. There is no evidence of a practical nature which indicates that socialization can avoid using the state as its primary instrumentality. Total socialization means a total state. The repudiation of a mixed economy and of statism in the same breath is a gratuitous and somewhat shamefaced effort to square a die-hard support of one of the primary Marxist-Leninist assumptions with what we know now of its devastating consequences. That is an inexpensive means of avoiding responsibility. Just as Trotskyism repudiates the history of Stalinism, yet is trapped into continuity with it through the assumptions which they share, so Mr. Vogel's repudiation of the history of bolshevism in general must suffer the same fate, for the same reasons.

The neo-bolshevik tendency for which Mr. Vogel speaks is not and cannot be a viable movement in its own right. His "independent program" accepts the sociological presuppositions of the bolsheviks and cannot avoid shaping the character of the movement along those lines. Look beyond the deviationist, critical-literary group which can spell out its differences in a resolution; look to the living movement which this program envisions and you will see the outlines of a structure which differs in no essential from bolshevism. The only way in which they can avoid this is by remaining loyal in practice to some basically social-democratic organization. And in this they go the way of every centrist tendency. Let us recall, too, that there is no example of a viable middle road between social democracy and bolshevism. Some minority groups (not the Spartacists, not Luxemburg) had a synthetic insight, but when they became influential, their basic commitments were decisive. For the ILP in Britain to adopt a revolutionary program, in Vogel's sense, it will be necessary to turn itself inside out, to change its basic character. Short of that, it remains in the social-democratic movement and will, in its day of influence, accept the responsibilities which that implies at the same time as it may endeavor to supply its special program.

I must confess that I am somewhat at a loss to understand the tone of righteous indignation which suffuses Mr. Vogel's listing of the failures of social democracy. To recount the history of the social-democratic "crimes" is to tell a tale of defeat. These things are part of what we mean when we acknowledge that the movement lost. Politics is a game played for high stakes. We deal with lives, fortunes, and the future. When a leadership achieves social influence, its decisions begin to have serious consequences. A mistaken judgment, an incorrect alliance made by a National Executive Committee may wreak untold havoc in the streets. An initial series of unsound commitments may bind a party's hands for years. As a political leader, Gandhi is a moralist; but he is not a milk-sop. When he makes a decision, right or wrong, he commits his followers to the danger and reality of destruction. Surely it is a curious estimate of the political act which expects the consequences of inadequate judgment to be either platonic or criminal. The Socialist Party today is cognizant of a series of conclusions as to policy which are lessons of social-democratic defeat. Among these injunctions are: (1) Do not support candidates or parties which are committed to the status quo; (2) Do not enter coalition governments; (3) On the basis of majority support and the utilization of police power, push through rapid socialization of financial and industrial oligopoly; (4) Create a loyal police power, do not lean on the old military establishment; (5) Do not organize a war, civil or otherwise. If these strictures are necessary, it is because we realize that serious errors were made in the past, and that it is possible that these lessons may lead to victory in the future. These are working political principles: they may be sufficient basis for splits, for separate parties. But they cannot, of themselves, distinguish a social movement. As working principles they are technical, profane; as such, they share this crucial attribute: it is not excluded that any one of them may be abandoned by some section of the movement without its thereby being automatically shut out from the socialist communion.

Not all of the difficulties of the social democracy were due to programmatic errors. It was certainly not free of bureaucratic degeneration, a process which hammers at formal programs and asks only for a living organization to provide its strength. This is a problem common to all organized effort, and cannot be met by wordy condemnation. Then, too, the basic values of a movement — summoned by the rack — are not always reducible to neat political formulae. Answers which will nicely articulate means and goals are not always

forthcoming, through later reflection and experience may provide solution post hoc. Finally, it is wise to remember that the advocates of a special program may, as a minority, be irresponsible with impunity. But a party leadership which becomes a government must accept responsibilities which could never be exhausted by its partial oppositional view. The little people may give us their majority on the basis of our special, though necessarily limited, program. They do not expect us to avoid the obligations of statesmanship to the continuity of order and custom.

"Should Selznick attempt to prove his polarization theory by pointing out that the German Independents later went back to social democracy and the Spartacists joined the Comintern, we might ask him to explain whether the present social-democratic and communist support of Roosevelt and Churchill proves that both of his polar tendencies must inevitably be dragged into the vortex of capitalist politics. Obviously Selznick dare not answer in the affirmative...." Let us see. The answer is: Yes, that must happen under conditions such as now prevail, when there is no effective social force outside the control of the capitalist parties. But that does not enervate political action—it merely orients effort toward changing precisely those conditions. Effective socialist action today is not focused on the main stream of national politics, which we cannot control, but upon those groupings which can coalesce into an independent farmer-labor-consumer force as an effective tool for later action vis-a-vis the major parties. We build for intervention in that arena; but if by some freak (perhaps through some accident of individual prominence) we were participants, we could not long avoid being pulled into the capitalist vortex. That must be true so long as that is where power rests.

I am by now accustomed to being read out of the socialist movement by the Defenders of the Faith. Yet I suggest that the viewpoint I have presented reflects majority opinion in the Socialist Party. This is evident in the attitude of most socialists toward the social-democratic Cooperative Commonwealth Federation of Canada, the willingness to build similar organizations here without the demand for programmatic completeness or purity, and in the party's ambivalent position on the war.

I cannot here discuss the "outmoded and unscientific human nature concepts" which Mr. Vogel deplures. The swing of the pendulum leaves many by the way. The easy optimism of relativist psychology could not serve the needs of political insight, which is faced at every turn with the facts of social and individual recalcitrance. New formulations to meet these needs will not long ignore the academic halls. Nor is it surprising that the tutors of Marxist "objectivism" can see only an inexplicable mysticism in all references to the spiritual and moral values which inform our choices between good and evil. These values are historical facts, with an empirical dynamics in the psychology of belief and a place in the history of ideas. In this history, Christianity is a monumental fountainhead, which the arid reformulations of the Enlightenment did not succeed in destroying. And if not its symbols, then surely its spirit and gospel are seed and inspiration for non-Christian pacifist and democratic thought.

PHILIP SELZNICK

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## CONSEQUENCES OF CONSCRIPTION

Congress is deliberating whether to fasten a year of compulsory military training upon post-war American youth. Apt to be overlooked are the effects of compulsory service upon human initiative, ambition and self-reliance—great intangibles which are the life blood of democracy. Except for a brief period preceding Pearl Harbor, our nation has never known peace time conscription. Twenty-six months in compulsory service have shown me things which happen to men serving under compulsion. Through the tolerance of my fellow citizens, who respect the consciences of those with whom they do not agree, I have been exempted from war and assigned to a Civilian Public Service camp. My countrymen might feel they were less generous if they realized that the psychological blight of forced service is worse than they probably imagine. The consequences of compulsory service bear scrutiny when peace time conscription is proposed, or a labor draft threatens.

Civilian Public Service provides a test of compulsory service, with the psychological effects of having to kill or be killed removed from consideration. The seven thousand men in CPS perform tasks which are comparable to some done in the army, although for different ends. Three-fifths are assigned to manual labor projects, such as constructing earth works and dams for improving the moisture and fertility of the soil, or building roads and timber breaks for forest fire prevention. One-fourth are attendants and maintenance men in hospitals and institutions, and the remainder are assigned to agricultural, sanitation and miscellaneous projects. There is less regimentation than in military service, so the deleterious effects seen are less, if anything, than what peace time military conscription would produce. Compared with the general population, CPS men have had more schooling, have a higher mean IQ, and appear to have greater religious maturity. They seem better equipped in some respects to adjust to the limitations of a regimented life.

Conscientious objectors are men with strong convictions, imbued with a desire to serve in ways which their religious principles permit. Many of them have relatives or close friends in the armed forces. They arrive at their camps anxious to fulfill the obligation which they feel. In a few short months their urge to serve wanes. They "soldier" on the job. Their will to serve is taken away by being compelled to work at tasks they do not consider significant. Some keep plugging away, giving valuable service by caring for inmates of mental hospitals or protecting forests in remote sections. That the majority have not given a better account of themselves reflects on CO's as a group. But it chiefly reflects on the system.

What the men do with their off-work hours reveals the changes brought about by conscription. Many CO's were formerly farmers, to whom wasting time was foreign. Quite a number were professional men: teachers, public employees, business men and students, who were

accustomed to use their time with drive and imagination. Some were active as peace leaders or reformers. Realizing the capabilities of their men, the historic peace churches who operate the camps under Selective Service have furnished wide opportunities for educational development. They have installed libraries, started study units, and sent lecturers on tours of the camps. The response to this educational program has been disappointing. Three-fourths of the men pass it by, except for movies or an occasional outstanding speaker. Interest in classes is short-lived. The usual picture in the barracks is disillusioning: men puttering with their belongings, throwing the "bull" about trivialities, whiling away the hours until they are again free men. Some of them go to bed as early as they can, trying to sleep through the frustrations pushed on them by conscription.

Frustration is the key concept of their lives. Like their neighbors in the army, they have ambitions of getting ahead in the world and rearing a family. They are blocked in these hopes, except for an occasional leave or furlough, by confinement at routine tasks without pay. Most difficult of all is frustration of the desire to be of service. CPS men see the world around them racked by suffering. They would like to lend a hand. But Congress has refused them a chance to give humanitarian service in war areas. The continual frustration worries and wears men out. They lose the energy or the desire to work hard on the project or forge ahead in their educational program. It is not surprising that loafing takes place.

CPS is unfitting capable men for the responsibilities of life. Fed, cared for, and told what to do, they lose their self-reliance. They become servile and institutionalized. Widespread pessimism has come over the camps. Men who used to plan peace rallies cannot be induced to come to committee meetings. The majority, exclusive of religious sects who never participate in government, do not take the trouble to write for their absentee ballots. The pacifist movement in CPS has almost lost its soul.

There are men in CPS, as there must also be in the army, in whom the limitations of conscription produce a constructive reaction. Those whose ambitions for a free world are sufficiently strong find their resolution intensified by the obstacles they face. Servitude tends to, but need not, dissolve men's moral fibre. In the past, powerful revolutionary movements have arisen from the ranks of slaves. Early Christianity made rapid progress among the slave classes of Rome. There are signs that the reaction in CPS is increasing. The May bill for post-war conscription is arousing greater interest than any other previous piece of legislation.

Some of the men have stuck by their educational program and have worked hard at what the government assigned them. They have not let their minds and work habits rust. They are better trained now for the post-war world than the day they were drafted. There are others who have held their own, or whose reaction has taken the form of cooperating with conscription as little as possible or accepting prison sentences rather than acquiesce in the evils of conscription at all.

More than four thousand CO's, the majority of them Jehovah's Witnesses, have been sentenced to federal prisons for various conscientious reasons.

The experience with conscription of pacifists shows that men are motivated, not by compulsion, but by goals and aspirations. Appeal to these aims, and they lead men to invent machines, build cities and create an ideal society. They can even be used to make men fight wars. Harass these lofty forces by putting them into a conscript mold, and men become things of clay or else revolt to preserve their own integrity. If we adopt permanent conscription, we risk destroying the qualities of character to which our democracy owes its strength.

PURNELL BENSON

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## HAYEK'S ROAD TO SERFDOM\*

It is a commentary on the desperation of our time that this book has been "digested," "round-tabled," and received with equal enthusiasm by precisely those against whom it was written: those masters of property and certain New Dealers whom Hayek describe as "monopolists" and "socialists" respectively. This may be another way of saying that the book is of little positive value; it is not to say the book is negligible. Its chief value lies in its refutation of the promises of a totally planned economy and, derivatively, in the implications of such an argument for other plans of social reconstruction.

Its central thesis is that since all forms of collectivism necessarily lead to totalitarianism, the only remaining and indispensable condition of freedom is liberal capitalism. "Collectivism" is any form of economic planning designed to regulate, qualify, or abolish free competition and the free market in the name of some distributive ideal. All forms of collectivism are in effect the same since all are united in subverting liberal capitalism. On the assumption that some form of planning is inevitable, the planners have set as their goal the conscious, centralized control of economic activity. Since economic life is inseparable from the totality of existence, economic control, which means control over the means of life, is therefore control over the means to all our ends. Individual freedom cannot survive subordination to a totally planned state. The only alternative to the planning of economic activity is the "rule of law" under which government restricts itself to fixing rules which simply determine the conditions and leave to individual discretion the ends of economic activity. The choice is between submission to an impersonal market and submission to the equally arbitrary power of the planners, whose deliberately imposed restraints mean not freedom but serfdom.

This, briefly, is Hayek's case against total planning; and insofar as it is directed against the strategists of the unlimited state it is irrefutable. Let us consider then Hayek's thesis in terms of an alternative plan of social reorganization.

Free competition, as Hayek abundantly recognizes, was destroyed by the growth of monopoly. But, despite the fact that his whole case rests on the resuscitation of free competition, he nowhere attempts a concrete solution to the problem of monopoly—except in one place where he concedes that those monopolies which are inevitable should be controlled by the state. (Presumably Hayek is referring to anti-trust laws!) Instead he tries to prove that most monopolies grew,

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\* *The Road to Serfdom*, by Friedrich A. Hayek, University of Chicago Press.

not out of the competitive system, but out of mistaken policies taken over from the socialist theoreticians of Bismarck's Germany. The implication is that America and England turned protectionist through a misunderstanding. For Hayek there is no real connection between technological development and economic planning: the whole collectivist trend derives from human perversity.

There is no need to refute this theory of economic history. The fact remains that we are confronted, not with a free market, but with the market of monopoly capitalism. It is sheer frivolity to oppose 18th and 19th century liberal theory to 20th century monopoly structures. And it is fruitless to insist that the freedom of the age of liberalism be the direct criterion of all economic life today.

This is not to say that the liberties inherited from the liberal age are irrelevant today. When Hayek warns us that the current reinterpretation of freedom is a ruse to subvert freedom, we have only to think of the Stalinists, the Fascists, and the totalitarian liberals, who have subverted not only freedom but truth itself. There is no doubt that we must retain the concrete liberties specified, for example, in the bill of rights, and traditionally associated with capitalism, and that these depend in large measure upon the survival of economic freedom. But in the face of monopoly and technological development, it is the task of our age to find analogues for the economic freedom of liberalism, which is not necessarily identical with unmitigated private ownership.

The answer to the monopoly threat to freedom is public ownership—and autonomy in relation to the state. We recognize with Hayek that the merging of the state bureaucracy with the monopolies leads to totalitarianism. Here TVA points in the right direction. A multiplicity of such public corporations, independent of one another, can no less than private corporations, compete and cooperate.

With Hayek the mere separation of economic and political power is sufficient to check monopoly growth; and so it was, in the age of liberalism. But while this separation would prevent state control of the economic order, it has been and will continue to be powerless to check monopoly control. And as monopoly grows, it moves toward totalitarian consolidation. It is for this reason that public ownership is essential to stop the totalitarian trend.

We can agree with Hayek that state ownership of all property is totalitarianism, but it does not follow from this that all private ownership should be left alone to pursue its own ends. While Hayek agrees also that private property should promote freedom and production, he resolves the problem in terms of his antithesis: either private ownership or state ownership. We can answer in favor of private ownership where it is productive and free, and against it where it is not.

Hayek rightly warns us to recognize and oppose any attempt to invoke obedience to an abstract state, and any leadership which holds out the promise of total fulfillment of diverse human needs. Again, it does not follow that all planning involves these. The need for intelligent planning remains. For which is required, not the unlimited state, but a reorganization of public and private enterprise into a workable system, together with a democratic balance of collective and personal freedom. Economic reconstruction does not call for the abolition and control of all property: it demands the abolition of that property whose ownership is functionless, toward the end that free productive enterprise is encouraged and strengthened through breaking monopoly's hold on it. Hayek calls for government control, but as A. P. Lerner has pointed out, control of monopoly will not prevent its movement toward eventual absorption of all free enterprise and its final resolution in a merger with the state. The only effective remedy is public ownership and management by directorates independent of state interference.

But, Hayek says, our society is far too complex and our know-

ledge too inadequate for a planned economy to work. Granted—but shall we quarrel with social development? Because he believes that our society is beyond comprehension, it follows that any attempt to plan it will fail. His alternative is therefore a return to the simple forms of economic liberalism. But since that return is impossible the only practicable alternative to a planned society is *Volkgemeinschaft*.

Against the difficulties and obvious dangers of total planning, we may oppose a system of autonomous sectors: public corporations, independent of both government and of one another, freely competing and cooperating; independent business enterprise, secure from the threat of monopoly; cooperatives, independent of the state and the trades unions; trades unions, independent of management and the state; free farmers, made independent by free technology and its own cooperatives—all finding their justification, not in obedience to the state, but in terms of service to their own communities. The state will be limited, relatively independent, democratic, and will move toward decentralization of all its functions and its bureaucracy.

Hayek would say that a pluralist economy can only lead to disaster, since it would be but a stage on the road to serfdom. But the very structure of such an economy will be designed to insure free enterprise, competition, and economic choice. The advantage of a pluralist economy is that it will at least limit the monopoly growth against which Hayek offers no defense. Because monopoly seems to inhere in the competitive system, planning is essential if the trend toward totalitarianism is to be deflected.

Hayek's lost liberal capitalism cannot save us. It is a fact of our time that, if faced with such a choice, man will choose security rather than freedom; as a matter of fact he has been gradually driven to such a choice by the consequences of Hayek's competitive system. And it is significant that Hayek remains positively coy about the causes of present day insecurity—unemployment, war.

Hayek's "collectivist" amalgam will convince none except those whose interests it objectively serves. If the choice were submission to an impersonal market or submission to the arbitrary power of men, we would certainly choose the former. But since this is not the choice, Hayek's freedom-or-planning antithesis becomes a rhetorical device; and it is because no such choice is really given that a pluralist economy is the most practicable and progressive form of social organization for our time.

—Frederic Camper.

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